

Location: The Pengzi, who number approximately 250 people, are one of the smallest ethnic groups in China. They live in the western part of Yunnan Province in southwest China, not far from the Myanmar border. The Pengzi are believed to live in the Wumulong District of Yongde County and possibly in the Mengban District as well.¹ The area, which lies within Lincang Prefecture, is mountainous and well forested.

Identity: Although small in number, the Pengzi view themselves as a distinct people group. They have also been mentioned in Chinese official sources from the area. The central government, however, has included the Pengzi as part of the official Yi nationality, which is a collection of about 120 different tribes and ethnic groups.

Language: Little is known about the Pengzi language, but it has been assumed that they speak a Western Yi variety because Chinese sources state that all Yi languages in Yongde County belong to the Western Yi branch of Tibeto-Burman. Other Yi languages in Yongde include Limi, Mishaba Lalo, Western Samadu, Suan, and Western Gaisu.

History: Without a written record of their origins, little is known about where the Pengzi came from and why. Over the past century, despite their dwindling population, the Pengzi have managed to cling to their ethnic identity.

Customs: The Pengzi live in a remote mountainous area. In China, rural areas have a particular charm about them. Vicomte d'Ollone, a French general who traveled through China between 1906 and 1909, wrote, "What a singular feeling obsesses one in the mountainous China, once the high-road has been left behind! The traveler feels himself a thousand leagues from all that pertains to civilization, organization, and society. There is no road communicating with the rest of the world; every one remains in his own home; there is neither post nor telegraph to bring news; men lead a tranquil existence, without troubling about matters of which they know nothing; there are no visits from officials from the outer world, no policemen, customs officers, highway inspectors, foresters, schoolmasters, or tax-collectors; there is no one but the village headman, appointed by the inhabitants.... All powers are concentrated in his person, yet he exercises none, for nothing is performed except by a common agreement, which is easily obtained."²

Religion: In the past the Pengzi practiced animal sacrifice to appease the spirits that governed their lives. In recent decades, however, and especially since the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when people were pressured to stop their animistic rituals, the Pengzi have become a more secularized people. The ancestors of the Pengzi are still worshiped at ceremonies held two or three times each year.

Christianity: The majority of the Pengzi live apart from all Christian influence. Few are aware of the gospel. Because of their small numbers, few outsiders, including both Chinese believers and foreign missionary organizations, have ever heard of the Pengzi.



Jamin Pelkey



Population in China:
 250 (1999)
 255 (2000)
 320 (2010)
Location: Yunnan
Religion: Ancestor Worship
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Pengzi

Countries: China
Pronunciation: "Pung-zi"
Other Names:
Population Source:
 250 (1999 J. Pelkey);
 Out of a total Yi population of
 6,572,173 (1990 census)
Location: *W Yunnan:* Wumulong
 and Mengban districts of Yongde
 County
Status:
 Officially included under Yi

Language: Sino-Tibetan,
 Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Lolo,
 Lolo, Northern Lolo, Yi,
 Western Yi
Dialects: 0
Religion: Ancestor Worship,
 Animism, No Religion
Christians: None known
Scripture: None
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: None

